

THE FORTUNE HUNTER

Novelized by
LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE
From the Play of the
Same Name by
WINCHELL SMITH

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and Louis Joseph Vance

"I wouldn't 've believed I could get away with it. Here goes for the next promising opening."

He headed for Sothern & Lee's drug store.

"Wonder what that fellow would have said if I'd had the nerve to wait and listen."

In the drug store he experienced less difficulty in making his speech and exit. He flattered himself that he accomplished both gracefully, even impressively. And indeed you may believe he left a gaping audience behind him. So likewise at Godfrey's notions and stationery shop.

"Now, this afternoon," he mused, "I'll wind up the job. By night every one in town will know I want work."

It was 2 o'clock or thereabouts, I gather, when, shaping his course toward Radville's commercial center, Duncan hesitated on the corner of Beech street, cocking an incredulous eye up at the weather worn sign which has for years adorned the side of Tut-hill's grocery—a hand indicating fixedly:

THIS WAY TO
GRAHAM'S DRUG STORE.
"Two druggists in Radville?" he mused. "Is it possible? Then it's Harry's mistake if the scheme fails. He said this was a one horse country town, but I'm blest if it isn't a thriving metropolis! Two! Here, I'm going to have a look."

He turned up Beech and presently discovered the object of his quest, a two story building of "frame," guiltless of the ardent caress of a paint brush since time out of mind. On the ground floor the windows were made up of many small square panes, several of which had been rudely mended. Through them the interior glimmered darkly. In the foreground stood a broken bottle, shaped like a mortuary urn and half full of pink liquid. Beside it reposed a broken packing box in which bleary camphor balls nestled between torn sheets of faded blue paper.

Of these a silent companion in misery stood on the far side of the window, a towering pagoda-like cage of wire in which (trapped, doubtless, by means of some mysterious bait known only to alchemists) three worn but brutal looking sponges were apparently slumbering in exhaustion. Back of these a dusty plaster cast of a male figure lightly draped seemed to represent the survival of the fittest over some strange and deadly patent medicine.

"WELL, I DECLARE!" HE SAID, RISING. cline. The recessed door bore an inscription in gold letters, tarnished and half obliterated:

AM GRAHAM
RUGS & CHEMICALS
SCRIPTION CAREFULY COMPOUNDED
"Looks like the very place for one of my acknowledged abilities," said Duncan. He turned the knob and entered, advancing to the middle of the dingy room.

A slight grating noise behind him brought Duncan round with a start. At a workbench near the window sat a white haired man garbed baggily in an old crash coat and trousers. His head was bowed over something clamped in a vise, at which he was tinkering busily with a file. He did not look up, but as his caller moved inquired amiably, "Well?"

"Good morning," stammered Duncan—"er—I should say afternoon."

Graham dropped his tools with a clatter and faced round. For a moment his eyes twinkled and a wintry smile lightened his thin old features. "Well, I declare!" he said, rising. "You must be the stranger the whole town's been talking about."

"If at any time," Duncan pursued hastily, "you should have an opening here that you can offer me I shall endeavor to give satisfaction. Good day, sir." And he made for the door.

"Are you in a hurry?" said Graham. Duncan paused, smiling nervously.

"Oh, no—only I mustn't press it, you know—just say it and get right—I mean I don't want to take up your valuable time, sir."

Graham chuckled. "Guess the folks haven't been talking much to you about me," he suggested. "You seem to have a higher opinion of the value of my time than anybody else in Radville."

"Yes, but—that is to say—"

"But if you're really looking for a job I'd like to give you one first rate."

Duncan started toward him in breathless haste. "You—you'd like to? You don't mean it?"

"Yes," Graham nodded, smiling with enjoyment of his little joke. It was harmless. He didn't for a moment believe that Duncan really needed employment, and on the other hand, it tickled him immensely to think that any one should apply to him for work.

"Well," said Duncan, starting, "you are the first man I ever met that felt that way about it."

Sam's amusement dwindled. "The trouble is," he confessed—"the trouble is, my boy, my business is so small I don't need any help. There isn't much of anything to do here."

"That's just the sort of place I'd like," said Duncan impulsively. Then he laughed a little uneasily. "I mean I'm willing to take any position, no matter how insignificant. I mean it, honestly."

"This might suit you, then?"

"I wish you'd let me try it, sir."

"But you don't understand."

Graham was serious enough now. There wasn't any joke in what he had to say. "To tell you the truth, I can't afford it. When your pay was due I'm afraid I shouldn't have any money to give you."

Duncan dismissed this paltry consideration with a princely gesture. "I don't mind that part," he insisted.

"Mr. Graham, if you'll teach me the drug business I'll work for you for nothing."

He said it earnestly, for he meant it just a bit more seriously than he himself realized at the moment, and I'm glad to think it was because Sam's serene and gentle, guileless nature had appealed to the young man.

"Between you and me," he hurried on, "it's this way—I've been here for two weeks with nothing to do but look at a book, and it's got me crazy enough to want to work."

As for Sam, as soon as he recovered he shook his head in thoughtful deprecation. "Well, I swan!" he said, "I guess you must find it pretty slow down here. But," brightening, "if you feel that way about it I'd better take you over to Sothern & Lee's. They'd be glad to get you at the price."

"And in a week they'd think they were overpaying me," Duncan argued. "No, I've been there. Why not try me on here?"

"Well, I'm just a little bit afraid you wouldn't learn much, my boy. I don't do business enough to give you a good idea of it."

Duncan brushed this impatiently aside. "How much business are you doing here now?"

"Some days," Graham reckoned it on his fingers—"I take in a dollar or two and some days nothing. There's my sody fountain," he said, with a jerk of a thumb toward it—"got that fixed up a little while ago, and it's bringing in a little—not much. You see, I need more sirups. I've only got vanilla now."

"Soda water!" Duncan jumped at the idea. "Hold on! All the girls round here drink soda, don't they?"

"Oh, yes," said Graham abstractedly.

know. We've got to build up the business. We'll put out some signs and—well, we'll get the people in the habit of coming here somehow. You'll see."

He raked the poverty stricken shelves with a calculating eye, all his energy fired by enthusiasm at the prospect of doing something. Graham watched him with kindling liking and admiration. His old lips quivered a little before he voiced his thought.

"You—you know, my boy, you've got splendid business ability," he asserted, with whole souled conviction. Duncan almost reeled. "What?" he cried.

"I was just saying you have wonderful business ability."

"You're the first man that ever said that. I wonder if it's so."

"I'm sure of it."

"Well," said Nat, chuckling, "I'll write that to my chum. He'll—"

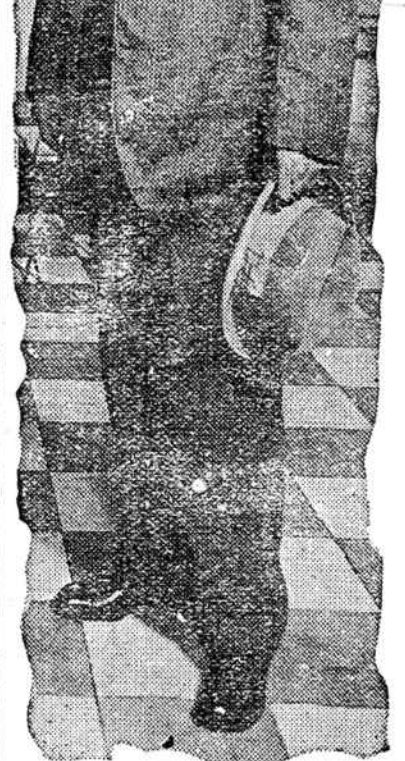
"Oh, I can tell," Graham interrupted. "Now, I— Well, you see, I've been a failure in business. So far as that goes, I've been a failure in everything all my life."

Duncan stared for a moment, then offered his hand. "For luck," he explained, meeting Graham's puzzled gaze as his hand was taken.

Wondering, Graham shook his head, and gratitude made his old voice tremulous. He put a hand over Duncan's, patting it gently.

"I want you to know, my boy, that I appreciate it." His voice broke. "It's mighty kind of you to buy the sirup—very kind."

"Nothing of the sort. It's just because I've got great business ability," Duncan laughed quietly and moved away. "We'll want to clean up a bit," said he. "Got a broom? I'll raise the



A SQUARE, DECENT MAN, SPERRY.

dust a bit while you're out sending that wire."

"You'll find one in the cellar, I guess, but—your clothes?"

"Oh, that's all right. Where's the cellar?"

"Underneath," Graham told him simply, taking down a battered hat from a hook behind the counter.

"I know. But how do I get there?"

"By the steps. You go through that door there into the hall. The steps are under the stairs to our rooms. I live above the store, you see."

"Yes. Goodbye, Mr. Graham."

"Goodbye, my boy."

Duncan watched the old man move slowly out of sight, then, with a groan, sat down on the counter to think it over. "It wouldn't be me if I didn't make a mess of things somehow," he told himself bitterly. "Now you have gone and went and done it. Mr. Fortune Hunter. You stand a swell chance of getting away with the goods when you take a wageless job in a spavined country drug store with no trade worth mentioning and nothing to draw it with just because that old duffer's the only human being you've spotted in this burg."

"Wonder what Harry would say if he heard about that wonderful business ability thing. But what in thunder can we do to bring business to this bum joint?"

He raked his surroundings with a discouraged glance.

"Oh," he said thoughtfully, "it's the limit."

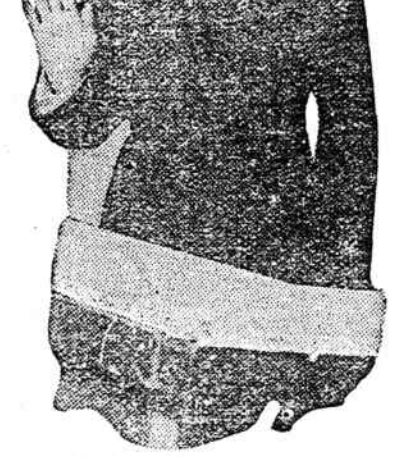
Five minutes later Ben Sperry found him in the same position, his head bent in perplexed reverie. Sperry had been traveling for Graham & Jones, a wholesale drug house in Elmira, more years than I can remember. His friendship for Sam Graham, contracted during the days when Graham's was the drug store of Radville, has survived the decay of the business. He's a square, decent man, Sperry, and has wasted many an hour trying to persuade Sam to pay a little more attention to the business.

"Anything I can do for you?" chirped Duncan cheerfully, dropping off the counter as Sperry entered.

"Not at all," Duncan turned. "You see," Sperry pursued, "I don't buy from drug stores; I sell to 'em."

Duncan faced about with new interest in the man. "Yes?" he said encouragingly.

"My card," volunteered Sperry, fish ing the slip of pasteboard from his



"LET US HOPE NOT," SAID DUNCAN.

waistcoat pocket. He dropped his sample case beside the store and plumped down in the chair, to the peril of its existence. "I don't make this town very often," he pursued while Duncan studied his card. "Sothern & Lee are the only people I sell to here, but I never miss a chance to chin awhile with old Sam. So, having half an hour before train time, I thought I'd drop in."

"Mr. Graham doesn't order from your house, then?"

"Doesn't order from anybody, does he?"

"I don't know. I've just come here. He'll be sorry to have missed you, though. He's just stepped out to wire your house—I gather from the fact that it's in Elmira; he mentioned that town, not the firm name—for some sirups."

"You don't mean it?" Sperry gasped. "What's struck him all of a sudden? He ain't put in any new stock for ten years, I reckon."

"Well, you see," Duncan explained artfully, "I've persuaded him in a way to try to make something out of the business here. We're going to do what we can, of course, in a small way at first."

Sperry wagged a dubious head. "I dunno," he considered. "Sam's a nice old duffer, but he ain't got no business sense and never had. You can see for yourself how he's let everything run to seed here. Sothern & Lee took all his trade years ago."

"Yes, I know. That's why he needs me," said Duncan brazenly. In his soul he remarked, "Oh, Lord!" in a tone of awe. His colossal impudence dazed even himself. "But don't you think he could get back some of the trade if the store was stocked up?"

"No doubt about that at all," Sperry averred; "he'd get the biggest part of it."

"You think so?"

"Sure of it. You see, everybody round here likes Sam, and Sothern & Lee have always been outsiders. They would swing to this shop in a minute just on account of that. Fact is, I wasted a lot of talk on our firm a couple of years ago trying to make our people give him some credit, but they couldn't see it. He owed them a bit then that was so old it had grown whiskers."

"And still owes it, I presume?"

"You bet he still owes it. Always will. It's so small that it ain't worth while suing for."

"Look here, Mr. Sperry, how much is this bill with the whiskers?"

"About \$50, I think," said the traveling man, fumbling for his wallet. "I'm supposed to ask for payment every time I strike town, you know, so I always have it with me, but I haven't had the heart to say a word to Sam for a good long time. Here it is."

Duncan studied carefully the memo randum: "To Mds. as per bill rendered, \$47.55." "I wonder"—he mused.

"Eh?" said Sperry.

"I was wondering. Suppose you were to tell your people that there's a young fellow here who'd like to give this store a boom. Say he wants a little credit because—because Mr. Graham won't let him put in any cash?"

"Not a bit of use," Sperry negatived. "I would myself, but the house—no."

"But suppose I pay this bill?"

"Pay it? You really mean that?"

"Certainly I mean it." Duncan produced the wad of bills which Kellogg had furnished him the night before his departure from New York. Thus far he had broken only one of the \$500 gold certificates, and of that one he had the greater part left. Living is anything but expensive in Radville.

"I'm beginning to understand that I was cut out for an actor," he told himself as he thumbed the roll with a serious air and an assumed indifference, which permitted Sperry to estimate its size pretty accurately.

"That's quite a stack of chips you're carrying," Sperry observed.

Duncan's hand airily waived the remark into the limbo of the negligible. "A trifle—a mere trifle," he said casually. "I don't generally carry much cash about me. Haven't for five years," he added irrepressibly. He extracted a fifty dollar certificate from the sheaf and handed it over. "I'll take a receipt, but you needn't mention this to Mr. Graham just now."

"Then that's all right. Tell your people to inquire of Harry Kellogg, the junior partner. He knows all about me."

Noting the name, Sperry put away the envelope. "That's enough. If he says you're all right you can have anything you want." He consulted his watch. "H-m-m! Train to catch. But let's see. What do you need here?"

Duncan reviewed the empty shelves, his face glowing. "Pills," he said, with a laugh—"all kinds of pills and everything for a regular, sure enough drug store. Mr. Sperry, everything Sothern & Lee carry and a lot of attractive things they don't small lots, you know, until I see what we can sell."

"I see. You leave it to me. I probably know what you need better than you do. I'll make out a list this afternoon and mail it tonight with instructions to ship it at the earliest possible moment."

"Splendid!" Duncan told him. "You do that and don't worry about our making good. I'm going to put all my time and energy into this proposition, and—"

"Then you'll make good all right," Sperry assured him. "All anybody's got to do is look at you to see you're a good business man." He returned Duncan's pressure and picked up his sample case. "Flong," said he and left briskly, leaving Duncan speechless.

As if to assure himself of his sanity he put a hand to his brow and stroked it caressingly. "Heavens," he said and sought the support of the counter. "That's twice today I've been told that in the same place!"

"It's funny," he said, half dazed. "I never could have pulled that off for myself."

CHAPTER IX.
PRESENTLY Duncan moved and came out of his abstraction.

"I'd better get that broom," he said slowly. "The place certainly needs some expert manuevering before we get that new stock in."

He swept the floor, thrilled with the sensation of accomplishment.

Two shadows moved slowly athwart the windows. Straightening up, he looked, gasped and fled for the back of the store. "Heavens!" he whispered.



STRAIGHTENING UP, HE LOOKED, GASPED AND FLED.

aghast to recognize Josie Lockwood and Angie Tut-hill, of whose ubiquitous shadows in his way he had been conscious so frequently within the past several days. "I thought I must have made an impression. Don't tell me they're coming in!"

Behind the counter he struggled furiously into his coat. "They are," he said, with a sinking heart, "and I'll bet a dollar my face is dirty!"

His bow was a very passable imitation of the real thing, he flattered himself, and there's no manner of doubt but that it flattered the two prettiest and most forward young women in Radville of that day.

"May I have the honor of waiting on you, ladies?" he inquired with all the suavity of an accomplished salesman.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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Established 1873
The Daily American

Terms by Mail, Postage Prepaid
Daily, one month .25
Daily and Sunday, one month .40
Daily, three months 1.15
Daily and Sunday, three months 1.50
Daily, six months 2.25
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made flexible—made with all the stiffness taken out. It has solved the shoe problem for thousands of women to whom new shoes are simon-pure torture. The sole is solid and tough, but it bends like a moccasin. The vamp is of kid, soft but tough as a board. You'll vote this shoe the most comfortable you ever slipped on. Style—all you care for. Wear—it's a Southern Girl and the Southern Girl shoe has a reputation in that line.

Made in all styles—slippers—pumps—lace and button boots.

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SHOES, SHOES, SHOES!

1500 PAIRS Sample Shoes.

To be sold at prime factory cost. No humbug. No deception. Shoes actually sold at jobbers prices—sample shoes too, 10 per cent better in quality—the same mark if carried in open stock. And besides a full sample line we have bought several job lots which will be sold at the same price. In these lines you can find sizes to suit anybody.

Shoes will be opened up on March 28th.

We will also make a sweeping reduction sale on other lines as follows:

Clothing

100 MEN'S SUITS,

and an immense line of

Odd Pants, Odd Coats, Boys and Children Suits, all of which we will sell at prices regardless of profit. We MUST make room for a spring stock.

Over Coats

We have 20 men's and boys' Overcoats that will go at prime cost.

We will also close out the following lines:

6 Heavy Horse Blankets
20 Bed Comforts
24 Children's Dresses, ages from 6 to 15 years
One lot Boys Duck Coats.

FURNITURE ETC.

2 Cook Stoves, 12 sets Dining Chairs, 20 Armed Rockers of different styles, 2 Solid Oak Bed-room Suits, 12 Iron Beds, 1 Cutting Box, 1 Sheep Shearing Machine.

IN FACT

We will offer our entire stock at unheard of Prices—I am determined to carry less stock. I POSITIVELY must reduce my stock \$3,000.00, and the only way to do it is to make the prices so they will go. I simply ask you to come in and see for yourself and be convinced that never in the history of this town has their been such an

EARHTQUAKE IN PRICES

As you will find at my store.

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I will handle all kinds of produce at Ruling Prices—but that the reduced prices are on cash or produce bases. Come and see me when you come to town and be convinced of the unheard of bargains. The above offer and prices will continue until May 1, 1911.

Very truly,
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A guaranteed cure for diseased eyes, granulated lids, inflammation of the lachrymal glands, dimness of vision and all weak conditions of the eye. Sold by your dealer or sent by mail for 25 cents. W. A. Weller, Proprietor, South Zanesville, Ohio.

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